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RUEHKSO/AMCONSUL SAPPORO 0254
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RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI 0023
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0655
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 NAHA 000243

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SUBJECT: CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE NAKAIMA WIN OKINAWA GOVERNOR'S RACE

REF: NAHA 0241

CLASSIFIED BY: Kevin K. Maher, Consul General, American
Consulate General Naha, DOS.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. On November 19, Okinawan voters elected conservative candidate Hirokazu NAKAIMA over reformist, anti-base candidate Keiko ITOKAZU as their new governor by a margin of 5.6 points. Nakaima's victory showed the Okinawan electorate rejected Itokazu's focus on the elimination of Marine Corp Air Station (MCAS) Futenma and other U.S. bases from Okinawa by 2014. Nakaima has publicly stated willingness to accept within Okinawa a MCAS Futenma replacement facility (FRF). Nakaima's stress on the need to lower Okinawa's high unemployment rate - the highest in the nation - and development of the prefecture's industrial base also resonated well. In pre-election polling, voters picked the economy as the most important issue in this election. Itokazu also failed to carry most of the base hosting communities, including Ginowan city, which currently hosts MCAS Futenma. However, editors and reformists refused to admit defeat for her anti-base position, blaming Itokazu's loss not on her policies but on her late entry into the race, about a month behind Nakaima. Reformists warned

both the GOJ and USG that the 300,000 plus votes cast for Itokazu show a large number of Okinawans remain opposed to the relocation of the FRF within the prefecture. End Summary.

12. (C) Conservative candidate Hirokazu Nakaima won a decisive victory over reformist, anti-base Keiko Itokazu 347,303 votes to 309,985 votes with a margin of 5.6 points. Also-ran Okinawa Independence Party candidate Chousuke Yara received 6,220 votes. Voter turnout, while low at 64.54 percent, was up 7.32 points from the 2002 gubernatorial race in which Governor Keiichi INAMINE was elected to his second term.

13. (C) Itokazu's opposition to the relocation of MCAS Futenma within Okinawa and call for eliminating U.S. bases within the prefecture by 2014 failed to resonate with voters, including those in base hosting communities. In Nago City, location of Camp Schwab and future site of the V-shaped, two-runway FRF, Nakaima beat Itokazu by 12 points, 16,090 to 12,537. Ginowan City, current home to MCAS Futenma, also selected Nakaima over Itokazu 21,944 to 20,138. Ginowan continued its conservative streak by electing conservative candidate Atsushin SAKAIMA in a bi-election for a vacant Okinawa prefectural assembly seat over the reformist candidate Seigyo ARAKAKI 15,067 votes to 10,940 votes. Among other base hosting communities, Okinawa City and Kadena Town (Kadena Air Force Base), Onna Village and Kin Town (Camp Hansen), Ginoza Village (under the flight route of the proposed V-shaped FRF) and Urasoe City (Camp Kinser) went for Nakaima. Only the small towns of Chatan Village (Kadena AFB) and Kitanakagusuku Village (Camp Foster) went for Itokazu.

14. (C) As mentioned in reftel, Nakaima might not be a bed of roses for the USG or GOJ. Following his victory, Nakaima reiterated his opposition to the V-plan because it was decided without input from Okinawans. He also said that he would

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continue Governor Keiichi Inamine's policies, which indicates he may continue to press for Inamine's proposal to build a temporary heliport at Camp Schwab. Nonetheless, he maintained his flexibility by adding he would participate in the GOJ-OPG-municipal consultations to come up with a plan that incorporates the voices of Okinawans. Nakaima also publicly back pedaled on his pledge to eliminate the danger of MCAS Futenma within three years, saying that he never used the word "eliminate" and had simply suggested that the GOJ work towards reducing the danger in three years. The morning after the election Nakaima told the press that with regard to the FRF plan, he will consult with the GOJ and the local government of Nago, and that he will represent the local voice. Since Nago Mayor Yoshikazu SHIMABUKURO has essentially accepted the FRF plan, we find this a positive sign.

15. (C) Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Komeito said in the press that Nakaima's win reflected Okinawans' desire to focus on the economy. LDP Okinawa said that Nakaima's economic policy was very concrete and supported by voters and this would help him to fulfill his public pledge. Komeito Okinawa more bluntly called Nakaima's win, "a victory of Okinawan people's common sense." LDP Tokyo also welcomed Nakaima's election. LDP Headquarters Policy Affairs Research Committee Specialist Shigenobu TAMURA told us privately that the LDP is comfortable with Nakaima and believes he will relax his policies post election and come to support the agreed FRF plan.

16. (C) Itokazu and the reformist parties backing her publicly blamed her loss on her late entry into the race, about a month behind Nakaima. Itokazu said her policies did not have time to reach the voters. Still she emphasized that the more than 300,000 votes that she got showed Okinawans' desire not to have new base construction on the island. Itokazu's Okinawa Socialist Masses Party (OSMP) lamented her failure to penetrate into the floating vote due to the delay in selecting the reformist candidate. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) called the result "unfortunate," saying Itokazu was the best candidate for the reformist camp, but they did not have enough time. It added that if there had been another 15 days, Itokazu could have

won. The Socialist Democratic Party, Japanese Communist Party (JCP) and Jiyu Rengo also decried the loss, but warned the GOJ and USG not to interpret the election results as Okinawans' acceptance of the GOJ's policies. JCP and Jiyu Rengo said that 300,000 votes for Itokazu showed that Okinawans did not want new base construction. Only center-right Sozo cited Itokazu's policies as the reason for her loss. The party told Okinawans to accept the result as the result, noted that people put economic issues ahead of base issues and called on Nakaima to work to decrease Okinawa's unemployment rate by half.

¶17. (U) From the start of the campaign, Okinawa's two major newspapers, the Ryukyu Shimpo and Okinawa Times, portrayed "the base problem" as the decisive issue in the campaign. They focused especially on the planned relocation of Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Futenma from urban Ginowan City to rural Henoko, within Camp Schwab. During a dinner at the Consul General's residence November 6, eight local journalists complained that Nakaima and Itokazu rarely strayed from their talking points.

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Two discussed heatedly how best to get Nakaima to reveal more clearly his position on relocating MCAS Futenma. The consensus of the journalists was that Nakaima would approve some version of relocation to Camp Schwab, but his strategic ambiguity successfully muddled the waters so they could not accuse him of giving in on this key point.

¶18. (U) The election day morning Okinawa Times Editorial went so far as to say MCAS Futenma relocation was the main point of contention. It pointed out that Itokazu had taken a firm stand of opposing relocation within Okinawa, and described Nakaima as criticizing the opposition for being unrealistic. The editorial threw in non sequiturs tying the Koizumi and Abe administrations to the Bush administration's war on terror, the uncertainty raised by the resignation of Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, and an over-reliance on the US-Japan Security alliance. It ended by calling people to vote in a manner they would not regret.

¶19. (U) The two papers did acknowledge that economic issues such as development funding, unemployment, financial restructuring, medical care and social welfare programs figured in the race. Both papers complained of lack of concrete, specific plans by the two leading candidates for dealing with these issues. A Kyodo News Service poll taken in early November showed Okinawan voters put base issues behind economic growth, social welfare and unemployment.

¶110. (C) Editorials after the election echoed the reformists' position that the 300,000 plus votes for Itokazu showed Okinawans' opposition to a FRF within Okinawa. The Ryukyu Shimpo admitted that Okinawans had entrusted the Okinawa Prefectural Government (OPG) to Nakaima because of his economic background and strong connections with the GOJ. However, it warned that if the GOJ took this result as a sign to proceed with US military transformation, it would have misunderstood the will of Okinawans. The Okinawa Times called on the new administration to develop concrete policies to revitalize Okinawa's economy, assessing that voters had selected Nakaima because they put priority on economic issues and promotion measures. The paper explained Itokazu's loss as Okinawan voters feeling they were powerless to resolve the base issue. It also noted that many Okinawans support Itokazu's policies opposing new base construction in Okinawa and Nakaima's victory is not a sign that voters accept US military realignment. The editorial said Okinawans still want MCAS Futenma relocated outside of Okinawa and that Nakaima should convey this to both the GOJ and USG.

¶111. (C) Conservative Nago Mayor Yoshikazu Shimabukuro welcomed Nakaima's election and asked Nakaima to show "understanding" on the V-shaped FRF, which the Mayor accepted in discussions with the GOJ earlier this year. Shimabukuro said he wants to discuss various policies with Nakaima and the GOJ on northern area economic promotion measures, medical and welfare policy, and base issues.

¶12. (C) Comment. We anticipate that Governor-elect Nakaima, shortly after his December 10 inauguration, will join the consultative meetings with the GOJ in order to demonstrate that he can express Okinawa views to the GOJ and that they are

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listening. We also think he will come around to accepting the agreed FRF plan, although it remains to be seen if he will try to place some conditions on that acceptance, as his predecessor Inamine did with the old SACO plan. It also looks as if Nakaima is backing away from his pledge to "eliminate" the danger of MCAS Futenma within three years, although we expect the reformist camp will attempt to hold his feet to the fire on this. In any event, we believe that our best approach is to continue with our position that we have reached agreement with the GOJ on a good realignment plan for Okinawa that will greatly reduce the burden of our bases here, that we expect the GOJ to continue implementing that plan in a timely manner, and that we look forward to cooperating with the new Governor in doing so.

End Comment.

MAHER